

2026 MANAGING PARTNERS FORUM PROGRAM OUTLINE

July 9-10, 2026 | The Langham | Chicago, Illinois

THURSDAY, JULY 9, 2026

6:00 P.M. – 9:00 P.M.

WELCOME RECEPTION & DINNER

Tortoise Supper Club – TC Lounge & Red Room

350 North State Street

6:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. Cocktail Reception

7:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m. Plated Dinner

Join your fellow ALFAI Managing Partners for an authentic Chicago Supper Club experience. You will indulge in mouth-watering cuisine and cocktails while enjoying the swanky jazz era vibe of the famous Red Room.

Transportation: If you are interested in walking to dinner with the group, please meet in the lobby of the Langham Hotel at 5:50 p.m. The Tortoise Supper Club is .1 miles from the hotel or a 3-minute walk.

Recommended Attire: Business Casual



FRIDAY, JULY 10, 2026

7:00 A.M. – 8:00 A.M.

BREAKFAST

Chelsea I

The Langham, Chicago

8:00 A.M. – 2:00 P.M.

PROGRAM SESSIONS

Chelsea II & III

The Langham, Chicago

8:00 A.M.– 8:10 A.M.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Welcome to the 2026 Managing Partners Forum!



Grace V.B. Garcia
Chair, ALFA International
MORRISON MAHONEY LLP
Boston, MA



Chris Keim
Chair, Managing Partners Forum
FRANTZ WARD
Cleveland, OH

8:10 A.M.– 9:10 A.M.

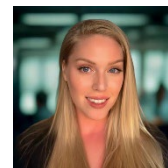
KEYNOTE SPEAKER SESSION I

Commercial Maturity — Connecting Strategy to the Levers That Drive (or Block) Growth

Every law firm’s strategic plan is built around some combination of profitability, headcount, and revenue growth. This session helps managing partners clarify which of those priorities truly drive their strategy and how well the firm’s internal levers are aligned with that focus. Using a Commercial Maturity framework, participants assess how their firm is operating across areas such as compensation alignment, pricing, leadership development, technology, operational efficiency, and cross-practice collaboration. The goal is not public firm-by-firm evaluation, but a shared lens for understanding where execution is creating momentum and where it is creating drag. The focus is realistic and incremental: identifying the few areas where moving up just one level over the next 6–12 months would have the greatest impact.



David Ackert
Co-Founder & CEO
ACKERT, INC.
Los Angeles, California



Jackie Kappus
Director of Community and Strategic Alliances
ACKERT, INC.
Los Angeles, California

9:10 A.M.– 9:25 A.M.

BREAK

9:25 A.M. – 9:45 A.M.

ALFA INTERNATIONAL HQ UPDATE: NEW INITIATIVES, RESOURCES AND STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

This session will provide a concise overview of opportunities and strategic perspectives shaping the ALFAI community, including enhanced member resources, upcoming seminars and new member firms. Attendees will gain insight into initiatives designed to help firms maximize the value of their membership. The discussion will also touch on characteristics of successful ALFAI firms, the importance of internal ALFAI succession planning and insights from the ALFAI Managing Partner SWOT analysis.



Jessica Zaroski Bauer
Chief Executive Officer
ALFA INTERNATIONAL
Chicago, Illinois

9:45 A.M. – 10:45 A.M.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER SESSION II**Making Change Stick — The Three E’s (Educate, Empower, Embed)**

This session builds on the Commercial Maturity discussion and focuses on execution: how firms actually turn strategic insight into sustained behavior change. Using the Three E’s sequence—Educate, Empower, Embed—participants explore why initiatives stall and how successful firms sequence change. The discussion emphasizes shared understanding, the psychological safety to try and learn, and the systems and accountability needed to embed progress, so it doesn’t fade under day-to-day pressures.

**David Ackert***Co-Founder & CEO*

ACKERT, INC.

Los Angeles, California

10:45 A.M. – 11:00 A.M.

BREAK

11:00 A.M. – 1:00 P.M.

FOCUSED ROUNDTABLES

Share insights, ask questions, and explore practical solutions in an open, collaborative setting. Come prepared to listen actively and speak candidly about the challenges your firm is navigating. These roundtables are organized into three focused discussion areas, formulated by feedback from ALFAI Managing Partners to address issues most relevant to member firms.

11:00 A.M. – 11:40 A.M.

FOCUSED ROUNDTABLE: AI INTEGRATION NEXT STEPS

- How Can Leadership Encourage AI Use Once Programs are Purchased?
- How are Firms Billing for AI?
- How Can AI Be Used to Improve Firms’ Profitability?
- Success Stories

11:40 A.M. – 12:20 P.M.

FOCUSED ROUNDTABLE: TALENT MANAGEMENT & WORKFORCE STRATEGY

- Creative Recruitment and Retention Tactics
- Succession Planning and How to Tell Senior Partners “It’s Time to Leave”
- Bridging Generational Gaps
- Parental Leave Policies and their Impact on Compensation

12:20 P.M. – 1:00 P.M.

FOCUSED ROUNDTABLE: EVOLUTION OF THE LEGAL PRACTICE

- How Can ALFAI Firms Work Together to Pitch and Defend Clients
- Changing Compensation Structures Based on the Changing Business of Law Firms
- Evolution Beyond the Billable Hour

1:00 P.M.

CLOSING REMARKS



Melanie Cheairs
Vice Chair, Managing Partners Forum
MAYER LLP
Houston, Texas

1:00 P.M. – 2:00 P.M.

LUNCH

Chelsea I
The Langham, Chicago

5:00 P.M. – 9:30 P.M.

**A SIGNATURE CHICAGO EXPERIENCE:
DINNER & COMEDY SHOW AT THE SECOND CITY COMEDY CLUB**

Moon Star Kitchen & Bar - 1617 N. Wells St.
The Second City Comedy Club - UP Theatre - 1616 N. Wells St.

5:00 p.m. – 7:45 p.m. Crafted Cocktails & Shareable Plates at Restaurant

8:00 p.m. – 9:30 p.m. Second City Show – UP Theatre



Enjoy the best in live Chicago-style sketch and improv comedy at The Second City Comedy Club. The group will start the night at a chic city escape, Moon Star Kitchen & Bar. Nestled between charming low-rise apartment buildings, the outdoor patio provides an al fresco spot that’s both private and full of urban character. Following dinner, we will walk across the street for a “Best of The Second City” show in the UP Theatre. The show will feature some of the best sketch comedies and songs from their comedy vaults that have been updated and performed by the touring company’s brightest and funniest.

***Transportation:** The restaurant and comedy club are a 12-minute drive (2.2 miles) from The Langham, Chicago. If you’d like to travel to the restaurant with other attendees, please meet in the Langham downstairs lobby at 4:45pm to organize rideshare. Otherwise, please meet us at the restaurant any time after 5pm. If you feel like a walk, it’s a lovely stroll through River North and the Gold Coast.*

***Recommended Attire:** Casual, jeans are acceptable.*

MANAGING PARTNERS FORUM SPONSOR:



John Unice
john.unice@bit-x-bit.com
Brett Creasy
brett.creasy@bit-x-bit.com

SPEAKER BIOS

DAVID ACKERT, Co-Founder and CEO of Ackert, Inc. and its subsidiary PipelinePlus, is a trailblazer in business development for professional services. With over two decades of experience, he has shaped revenue acceleration programs for hundreds of firms worldwide, earning a reputation as a thought leader who makes growth feel both strategic and human. His ability to distill complex BD challenges into practical, relationship-focused solutions has transformed how lawyers, consultants, and other professionals approach their work. David's vision has led to pioneering ventures like Legal Lift, the MLR100, MLR200, BDI, and exclusive Managing Partner Roundtables, alongside the innovative PipelinePlus software suite. His programs have earned "Your Honor Awards" in the U.S. and Canada, and his software has been spotlighted in NLJ's "Technologies on the Rise." A sought-after speaker, David keynotes at partner retreats, industry conferences, and lectures at USC's Marshall School of Business, Carnegie Mellon University, and UCLA School of Law. As the bestselling author of [The Short List: How to Drive Business Development by Focusing on the People Who Matter Most](#), a 2025 Gold Nonfiction Book Award winner, David's insights have resonated widely, appearing in the Los Angeles Times, Wall Street Journal, Above the Law, and more. His Market Leaders Podcast has claimed JD Supra's Reader's Choice Award for two consecutive years. Beyond his professional impact, David is deeply committed to giving back. He volunteers as a Big Brother with Big Brothers and Sisters in Los Angeles and co-founded Voices in Harmony, mentoring at-risk youth globally. His work in Northern Uganda, featured in the documentary After Kony: Staging Hope, helped raise millions for health and education in underserved communities, earning him the "Difference Maker" award from Ithaca College. With a master's in psychology and a Fellowship at the College of Law Practice Management, David brings a unique blend of empathy and expertise to everything he does, inspiring professionals to build meaningful connections and lasting success.

JESSICA ZAROSKI BAUER joined ALFA International (ALFAI) in 2004 as a Coordinator of Events & Member Services. She then worked for several years as a Marketing Manager, Chief Events Officer, and Chief Operating Officer. After 17 years with the association, she accepted her current role as Chief Executive Officer. In this position she is the strategic thought leader of the organization, working closely with the Board of Directors and the various ALFAI committees. She manages headquarters staff and maintains constant communication with association members. Jessica oversees the member recruitment, development, and retention programs as well as the marketing and business development initiatives for the organization. Prior to joining ALFA International, she worked in the marketing department of the Chicago-based law firm of Gardner, Carton & Douglas, LLP (now Faegre Drinker Biddle & Reath). She is a graduate of the University of Iowa Tippie College of Business (Go Hawkeyes!) and is an avid college football fan. In her spare time Jessica can be found enjoying family time with her husband Harry and her two young daughters, Greta and Vivian.

MELANIE CHEAIRS is a partner with Mayer LLP, the ALFA International member firm in Houston, Texas. Melanie is an experienced trial lawyer, defending her clients in the Hospitality, Retail and Transportation industries in both commercial and injury related catastrophic loss matters. Melanie was honored as the 2016 Recipient of ALFAI's Nathan Fishbach Attorney of the Year Award. Melanie was also the program chair of ALFAI's 2016 International Client Seminar and previously chaired ALFAI's Hospitality and Retail Practice Group. In addition, she also served as chair of ALFAI's Marketing Committee.

GRACE V.B. GARCIA, a Partner in the Boston office of ALFA International member firm Morrison Mahoney LLP, concentrates her practice in the areas of product liability, construction law – including personal injury, construction defect, and contractual - OSHA, commercial litigation, employment litigation, premises liability and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) cases. Grace currently serves as Chair of ALFA International's Board of Directors and is a former Chair of both ALFA International's Construction Practice Group and Women's Initiative Practice Group. Grace has an AV Preeminent Rating from Martindale Hubbell and in 2020 she was honored by

Massachusetts Lawyers Weekly with its “Circle of Excellence” after being honored in 2013 as a “Top Women of Law.” Grace has over 25 years of trial practice and litigation experience and has obtained successful outcomes on behalf of her clients in both state and Federal Court trials. She has also successfully argued before the Appeals Court. Beyond ALFAI, she is actively involved in many professional groups and is the Immediate Past-President of the Massachusetts Bar Association. Grace is also a past President of the Massachusetts Defense Lawyers Association and past DRI State Representative for Massachusetts. She is a routine lecturer on defending brain injuries, risk transfer and indemnity issues, best discovery practices and deposition techniques, and OSHA.

JACKIE KAPPUS is a master at fostering genuine connections in the legal world. As Director of Community and Strategic Alliances at PipelinePlus, she creates spaces where attorneys, in-house counsel, and industry leaders can engage in real, impactful conversations. Her work centers on building trust and collaboration, whether through leading our invitation-only roundtables for law firm leaders or spearheading Legal Lift—a one-day forum that brings together in-house counsel and law firm partners to challenge assumptions and align on shared goals. With nearly a decade in the legal industry, Jackie has a deep understanding of what makes firms and clients tick. Her time at Legal Decoder, working alongside Joe Tiano, gave her a front-row seat to the operational and financial complexities of law firms—especially around pricing, value, and client expectations. That perspective shapes her ability to facilitate meaningful dialogue that bridges gaps and drives progress. At PipelinePlus, Jackie also cultivates strategic alliances with legal tech companies, consultants, and expert faculty. She’s passionate about designing communities where smart, generous professionals can share ideas and solve problems together. Known for her relationship-first mindset and endless curiosity, Jackie has a gift for turning casual conversations into lasting collaborations. She’s committed to creating environments where professionals don’t just network—they connect on a human level, sparking ideas that lead to real change.

CHRISTOPHER G. KEIM is the Managing Partner of the ALFA International member firm Frantz Ward in Cleveland, Ohio. In addition to his Managing Partner and Management Committee responsibilities, Chris’ legal practice focuses on civil litigation matters, including general business disputes, product liability claims, transportation law, employment litigation, and corporate investigations. He has extensive experience in successfully defending businesses through trial and arbitration throughout the U.S., with over seventy-five bench and jury trials to date. This includes representing closely held and publicly traded companies and their insurers in routine and catastrophic litigation.